SUPERMAN
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TATTOO AND THE MAN-TIS
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JAPAN. TOKYO. LONG AGO.
WHICH WAY?
I -- I CAN'T REMEMBER HE -- HUFF --
HE -- HE'S NEVER BEEN LIKE THIS BEFORE. HE'S SO ANGRY, AND I -- I DON'T KNOW WHAT HE'S --
OH GOD. I'M SO FRIGHTENED. HE WAS GOING ON AND ON ABOUT HUMAN NATURE AND EVIL --
IT'LL BE OKAY, LI... I PROMISE.
WE JUST HAVE TO TALK TO HIM BEFORE --
NO. OH GOD, NO.
(DEAR LORD IN HEAVEN...)
TRANSLATED FROM JAPANESE -- ED.
T-TOKAI? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
I SHOWED THEM... THE TRUE FACE... OF THE WORLD.

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Doomed Planet Krypton. The rocket. A child. Journey across cold space. Earth. Smallville. Crash-landing. The Kents. Learns TRUTH, JUSTICE and THE AMERICAN WAY. Faster than a Speeding Bullet. Stronger than a Locomotive. A Man can fly. Believe.

SUPERMAN in ACTION COMICS!

MERCY, LOVE, AND BLOOD PART TWO

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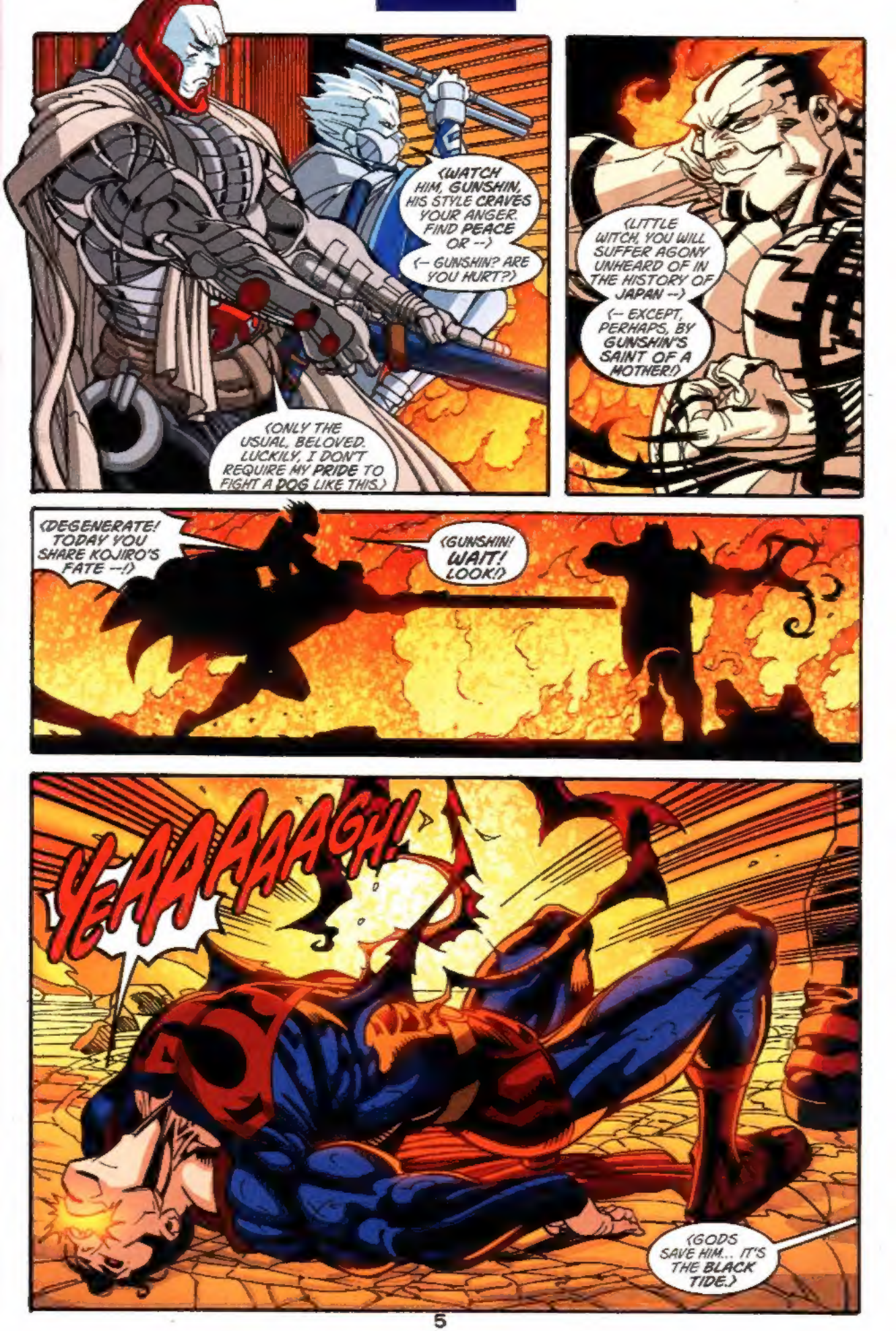
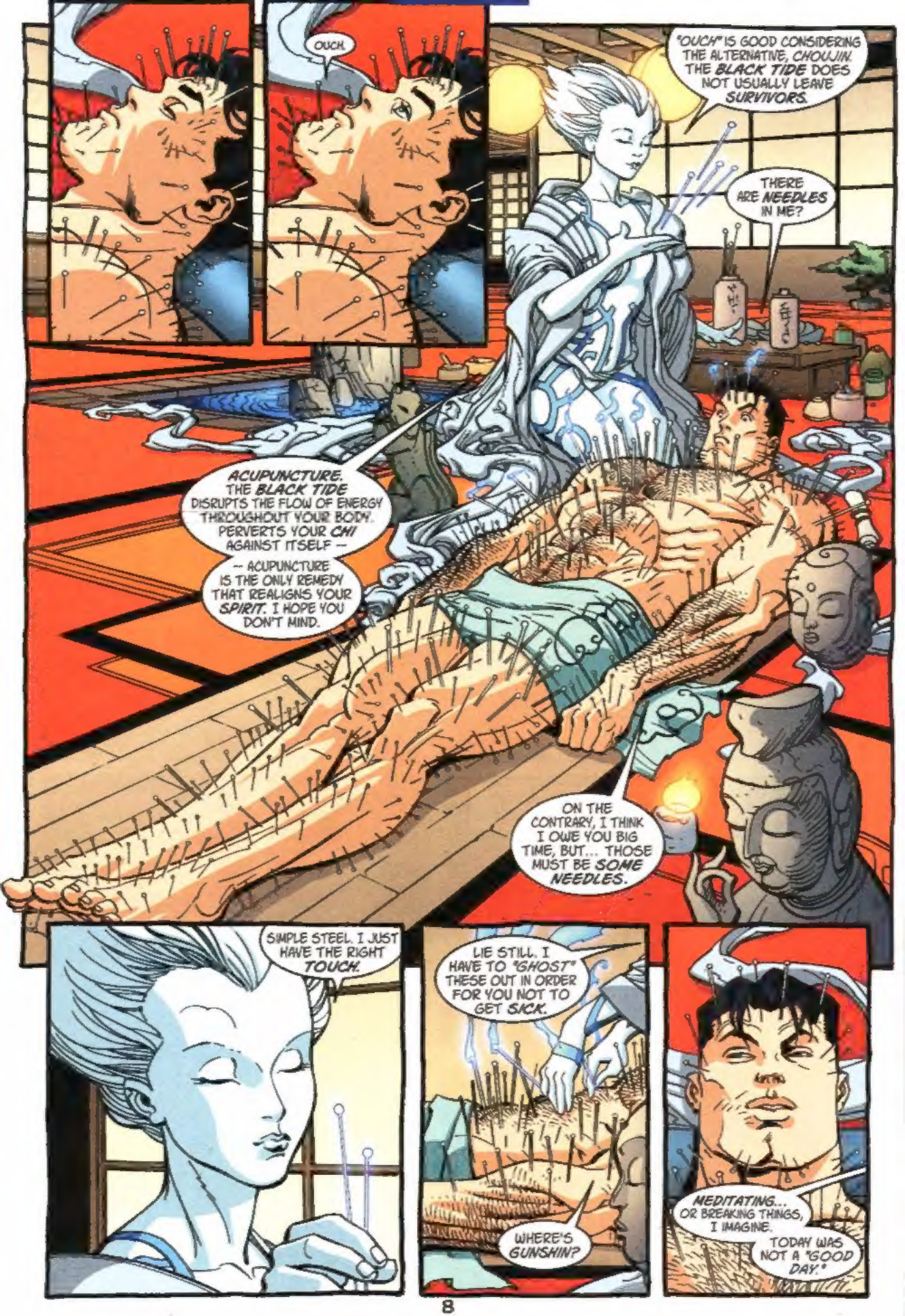
(BLOOD SEEKS BLOOD, SAKKI.)
(DON'T I KNOW IT? I CAN SMELL YOUR BLOODLUST FROM HERE, GUNSHIN. LIKE FINE WINE. LIKE A KISS--)
(BUT DON'T THINK I FORGOT YOU, LITTLE FOX SPIRIT!)
(BYAKKO! WHAT ARE YOU DOING --?)
(SAVING YOU FROM MAKING A MISTAKE, HUSBAND. THIS PHASE OF THE WAR IS BEST FOUGHT WITH --)
(--PEACE.)
FWOTK
GCCHT!
...
(FORCE WITHOUT ANGER -- HNNGH -- BLOODLESS STRIKE.)


(WATCH HIM, GUNSHIN. HIS STYLE CRAVES YOUR ANGER. FIND PEACE OR --)
(-- GUNSHIN? ARE YOU HURT?)
(ONLY THE USUAL, BELOVED. LUCKILY, I DON'T REQUIRE MY PRIDE TO FIGHT A DOG LIKE THIS.)
(LITTLE WITCH, YOU WILL SUFFER AGONY UNHEARD OF IN THE HISTORY OF JAPAN --)
(-- EXCEPT, PERHAPS, BY GUNSHIN'S SAINT OF A MOTHER!)
(DEGENERATE! TODAY YOU SHARE KOJIRO'S FATE --!)
(GUNSHIN! WAIT! LOOK!)
YEAAAAAGH!
(GODS SAVE HIM... IT'S THE BLACK TIDE.)

(WHAT TO DO, WHAT TO DO? KILL BIG BAD SAKKI... OR TRY TO SAVE THE VIRTUOUS SUPERMAN FROM CONSUMPTION BY BLACK RAGE?)
(WHAT DOES VENGEANCE COMMAND, GUNSHIN?)
(I CAN STOP IT, MAYBE, IF WE GET HIM HOME --)
(SAKKI WILL ESCAPE.)
(SUPERMAN WILL DIE.)
(AN UNFORTUNATE --)
(HEH. EVEN YOU, GUNSHIN? AMAZING. THERE'S NOTHING SPECIAL ABOUT HIM, YOU KNOW... NOTHING THAT MAKES HIM BETTER THAN US.)
(THAT'S WHAT I TOLD HIM, LAST TIME WE SPOKE IN JAPAN --)
(-- WHEN HE REFUSED TO LET ME DIE.)
(THINK OF THAT... AS YOU NURSE HIM BACK TO HEALTH.)
(THINK OF MOTHER. THEN...)
(...FIND ME.)
(SO... SHALL I JUST BURY HIM HERE?)
(OR DO WE CARE TO HEAR HIS SIDE OF THE STORY BEFORE EXECUTING HIM?)

VIENNA.
Can you hear me, Clark? If I sneeze in Montana, you say "Gezundheit" from Berlin.
But can you hear me thinking? Yelling at myself for not getting on a plane home?
Wondering where I can go next?
Wondering if I can fly fast enough to be on the opposite side of the globe from you all the time...
...without a single clue why.
Except that I think I hate you.
LOIS --?
OH! READY ALREADY? SORRY -- AHEM -- SO WHAT'S ON THE MENU TODAY? MORE HATS? ACCESSORIES? WHERE ARE WE BURNING OUR CREDIT TODAY --?
LOIS... ENOUGH.
IT'S YOUR TURN NOW.
WHAT? NO, I --
IT'S YOUR TURN TO TALK. COME ON... I WON'T BREAK. IT'S YOUR TURN. TALK TO ME.


OUCH.
"OUCH" IS GOOD CONSIDERING THE ALTERNATIVE, CHOUJIN. THE BLACK TIDE DOES NOT USUALLY LEAVE SURVIVORS.
THERE ARE NEEDLES IN ME?
ACUPUNCTURE. THE BLACK TIDE DISRUPTS THE FLOW OF ENERGY THROUGHOUT YOUR BODY. PERVERTS YOUR CHI AGAINST ITSELF --
-- ACUPUNCTURE IS THE ONLY REMEDY THAT REALIGNS YOUR SPIRIT. I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND.
ON THE CONTRARY, I THINK I OWE YOU BIG TIME, BUT... THOSE MUST BE SOME NEEDLES.
SIMPLE STEEL. I JUST HAVE THE RIGHT TOUCH.
LIE STILL. I HAVE TO "GHOST" THESE OUT IN ORDER FOR YOU NOT TO GET SICK.
WHERE'S GUNSHIN?
MEDITATING... OR BREAKING THINGS, I IMAGINE.
TODAY WAS NOT A "GOOD DAY."

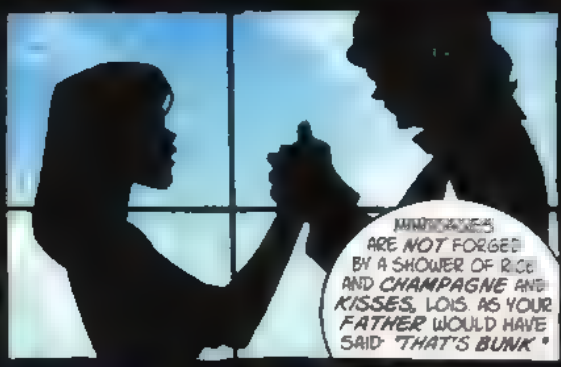
RIGHT... LISTEN, BYAKKO, I... I DON'T KNOW HOW TO SAY THIS, BUT --
"-- BUT NOTHING HAS CHANGED BETWEEN US. WE ARE KILLERS, AND MUST BE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE."
SOMETHING LIKE THAT?
YES... ONLY MINUS THE SARCASM. AND I WAS GOING TO THANK YOU FOR SAVING MY LIFE FIRST.
WHY DO YOU DO IT? YOU TWO... THE SHEER FORCE YOU HAVE... I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT...
"BLOOD DEMANDS BLOOD." YOU MUST HAVE HEARD US SAY THIS ALREADY.
YOU DON'T SOUND LIKE YOU BELIEVE THAT.
WSSSH
SOME DAYS I DON'T.
THEN, I SEE A DEAD CHILD STILL CLUTCHING HIS MOTHER, BURNED BY SOMEONE LIKE SAKKI, AND IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE.
YOU CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT. WE DON'T HAVE TO KILL TO STOP HORRORS FROM BEING COMMITTED.
DON'T WE? YOUR GOVERNMENT DOES IT EVERY DAY.
THAT ISN'T EXACTLY FAIR.

IS IT FAIR THAT MY HUSBAND'S MOTHER WAS CUT DOWN IN CROSSFIRE BETWEEN ASAMIYA AND KOJIRO'S YAKUZA?
IS IT FAIR WHEN CRIMINALS MURDER AND RAPE AS THEY SEE FIT?
IF YOU'RE NOT THAT WAY WE
IS IT FAIR THAT YOU LET LIVE HAS KILLED AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN?
BLOOD SPILLED BY SAKKI IS ON YOUR HANDS, SUPERMAN! WHERE IS THERE FAIRNESS OR "JUSTICE" IN THAT?
I DIDN'T KILL AN ANIMAL LIKE SAKKI I COULDN'T THEN I CAN'T NOW
AND I CAN'T LET YOU KILL, EITHER WE HAVE TO BE BETTER THAN THAT WE --
WE ALREADY HAVE KILLED CHOOSE WE WILL DO AGAIN, TONIGHT
GUNSHI HAS DECIDED TO BRING ME TO KOJIRO AND SAKKI DIRECTLY
TONIGHT THE KOJIRO CLAN DIES
YOU DON'T WANT THIS, REALLY DO YOU? YOU'RE TELLING ME SO I'LL STOP YOU
I WANT MY HUSBAND TO FIND PEACE, SUPERMAN I WANT THIS WAR TO END I'VE TOLD YOU ABOUT TONIGHT
SO YOU WILL STAY AS FAR AWAY FROM MY HUSBAND AS POSSIBLE AND PRAY
THAT WE CONSIDERS IT PAYMENT FOR THE BLOOD DEBT YOU OWE FOR ANIMAL LIKE

OUR FATHER WAS THE MOST STUBBORN ARROGANT, THICK-SKULLED MAN I'D EVER MET. HE WAS CHAUVINISTIC, AT TIMES A RACIST, AND AS MANY TIMES AS NOT --
-I HATED HIM
I MEAN HATED. NOT MILDLY DISLIKED HATED.
WE LOST FRIENDS, FAMILY BECAUSE OF HIS NONSENSE
DO YOU KNOW HE ONCE THREW OUT EVERY RECORD I OWNED BECAUSE I SAID THAT FRANKIE VALLI WAS CUTE?

THAT'S WHY YOU CHEATED ON HIM?
I GET IT. SO IF YOU HATED HIM SO MUCH, WHY'D YOU STAY TOGETHER?
AND DON'T SAY "BECAUSE WE WERE MARRIED --"

BECAUSE WE WERE MARRIED. BECAUSE HE WAS MY PARTNER BECAUSE -- AS INSANE AND IMPOSSIBLE AS THINGS WOULD GET --
-- THERE WASN'T EVER -- EVER A PROBLEM WE COULDN'T FIX TOGETHER


MARRIAGES ARE NOT FORGED BY A SHOWER OF RICE AND CHAMPAGNE AND KISSES, LOIS. AS YOUR FATHER WOULD HAVE SAID: "THAT'S BUNK."

A MARRIAGE IS FORGED THROUGH FIRE.
I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOUR ISSUE IS WITH CLARK -- OR SUPERMAN, FOR THAT MATTER. AND I KNOW BETTER THAN TO TRY TO DIG IT OUT OF YOU --

BUT BEFORE YOU BOOK US ON ANOTHER FLIGHT TO NOWHERE ASK YOURSELF
TO SOLVE THIS PROBLEM DO YOU NEED YOUR MOTHER. OR YOUR HUSBAND?

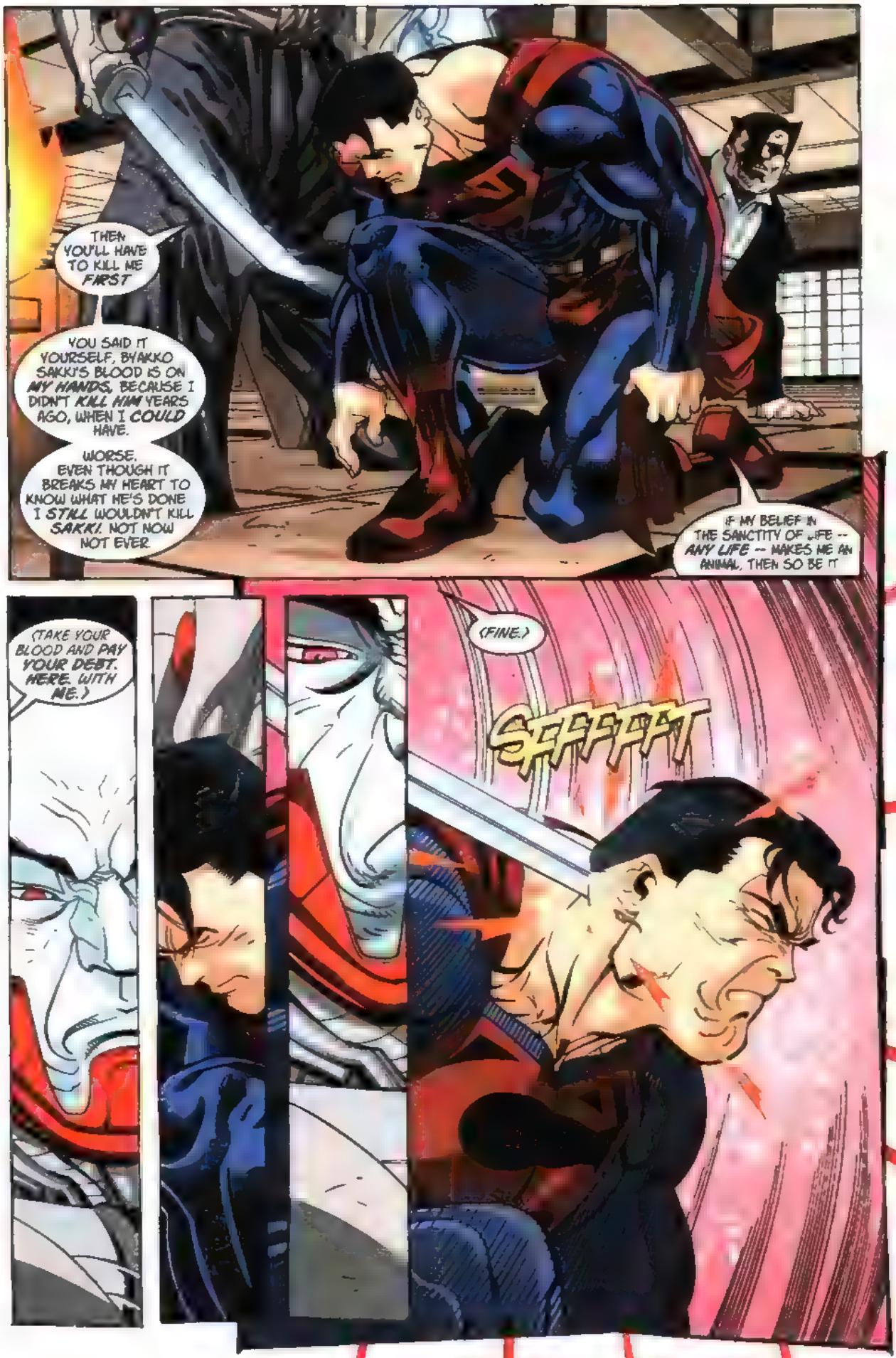
KOW
POW
NOW
(SAKKI! WHERE ARE YOU, DAMMIT?!)
(FOR KOJIRO!)
(HE'S HERE! GUNSHIN IS HERE!)
(HERE TO SLAY THE TIGER.)
(HERE FOR YOU, KOJIRO.)
(REALLY? ARE YOU CERTAIN IT'S HIM? TALL FELLOW? ANGRY?)
(YOU'RE NOT COMING ARE YOU?)
(YOU WANTED WAR. YOU WANTED GUNSHIN. YOU WANTED PROOF OF MY VALUE TO THE CLAN. WELL, I'M GIVING YOU ALL THREE.)
(WHEN GUNSHIN IS DONE WITH YOU, I WILL RUN KOJIRO CLAN.)
(WHEN SUPERMAN IS DONE WITH GUNSHIN I WILL RUN TOKYO.)
(AND WHEN I'M DONE WITH SUPERMAN...)

(WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD IT WILL BE GOOD-BYE KOJIRO)
(A-A-C MERCY
(EXACTLY NO MORE MERCY)
CHOUJIN

WE'RE BOTH SCREAMING IN LANGUAGES THE OTHER BARELY UNDERSTANDS.
THE HITTING DOESN'T HELP MUCH.
I'M MOVING SO FAST, I'M SETTING OFF SONIC BOOMS. HE'S HAMMERING ME LIKE A METEOR EVERY TIME
(THIS CAN STOP. YOU CAN MAKE A CHOICE.)
(AHHH THERE IT IS.)
(THEY ARE ANIMALS! THEY CANNOT EVEN BE CALLED HUMAN!)
(NEVER THOUGHT YOU HAD IT IN YOU, GAIJIN.)
BLOODLUST SEETHING POWER

AND THROUGH IT ALL I REMEMBER I'M DEFENDING DRUG DEALERS, MURDERERS, WORSE
AND THIS ISN'T EVEN MY HOME
AND FOR A MOMENT, I ACTUALLY THINK THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN WHAT WE'RE DOING HERE
<Y-YOU -HNNGH= I KNOW YOU'RE A GOOD MAN--.
<INNOCENT BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS, SUPERMAN! I WILL NOT HAVE IT ON MINE!>
YEARGH!

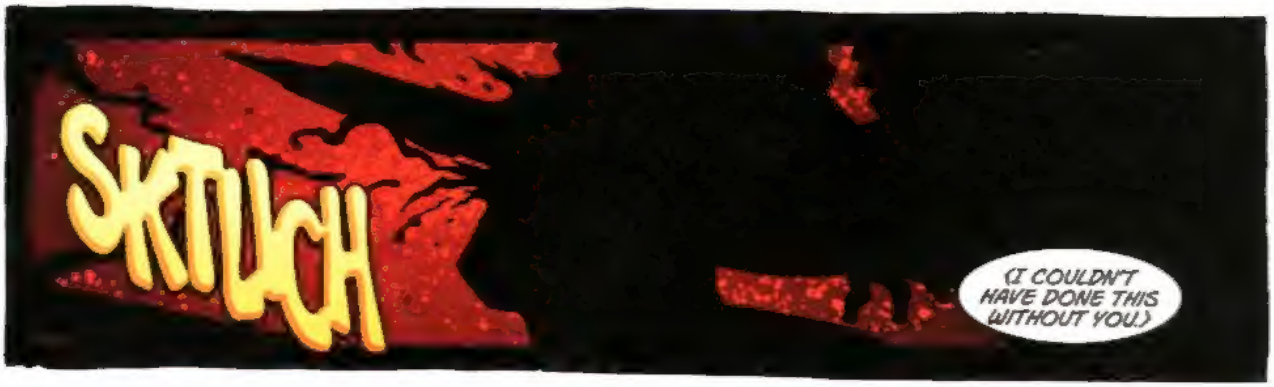
WHY COULDN'T YOU STAY AWAY? I ALL BUT BEGGED YOU THIS IS NOT ABOUT YOU -- !
:HNNGH:
PLEASE! I ONLY BONDED THE SMALLEST AMOUNT OF YOUR FLESH TO THE FLOOR WHEN I GHOSTED IT THROUGH --
-- BUT I CAN DO THE SAME TO YOUR HEAD, YOUR HEART. I DO NOT WISH TO.
(WHY ARE YOU SPEAKING TO HIM? FIGHT --)
(STOP IT, GUNSHIN. PLEASE.)
YOUR SYSTEM. YOUR SENSE OF "RIGHT" DOES NOT APPLY TO THESE ANIMALS. THEY ARE NOT HUMAN. THEY BATHE IN THE BLOOD OF INNOCENTS!
CUTTING THEM DOWN IS THE ONLY WAY TO ENSURE THEIR EVIL DOESN'T SPREAD
BLOOD DEMANDS BLOOD!


THEN YOU'LL HAVE TO KILL ME FIRST
YOU SAID IT YOURSELF, BYAKKO SAKKI'S BLOOD IS ON MY HANDS, BECAUSE I DIDN'T KILL HIM YEARS AGO, WHEN I COULD HAVE.
WORSE. EVEN THOUGH IT BREAKS MY HEART TO KNOW WHAT HE'S DONE I STILL WOULDN'T KILL SAKKI. NOT NOW NOT EVER.
IF MY BELIEF IN THE SANCTITY OF LIFE -- ANY LIFE -- MAKES ME AN ANIMAL, THEN SO BE IT
(TAKE YOUR BLOOD AND PAY YOUR DEBT. HERE. WITH ME.)
(FINE.)
SFFFFFT

TAK!
"TELL ME AT EAST THAT WAS NOT JUST A TRICK
YOU HONESTLY BELIEVE GUNSHIN WOULD HAVE KILLED YOU
IF YOU HADN'T GHOSTED THAT SWORD THERE'S NO DOUBT IN MY MIND
SO NOW WHAT?
NOW WE CHANGE. WE TRY THE "SYSTEM." WE SUFFER PUNISHMENT, SHOULD JAPAN DEEM IT NECESSARY
. . .AND I TRY TO CONVINCE MY HUSBAND THAT I HAVE NOT BETRAYED EVERYTHING HE BELIEVES IN.
"SO THAT WAS IT, CLARK? SUPERMAN JUST LEFT HER?"
"THAT WAS WHAT HE SAID, JIMMY. SAID HE COULD SEE IT IN HER EYES, SHE'D BE TRUE TO HER WORD
". . .AND THAT EVEN THOUGH HE'D DONE WHAT HE BELIEVED WAS RIGHT, PUSHING THEM AWAY FROM THEIR VENDETTA.
" HE COULDN'T HELP BUT FEEL THAT HE'D JUST WATCHED A MARRIAGE DIE BY THE END, I THINK.

"...I THINK HE JUST WANTED TO GO HOME."
SO, A FUNNY THING HAPPENED TO ME ON MY TRIP AROUND THE WORLD...
...I DIDN'T WANT TO COME HOME.
LOIS -- ?
WAIT. I HAVE TO TALK. PLEASE, OR I'M NOT GOING TO GET THIS OUT.
FSSSH
(BYAKKO?)
(YOU LOST FACE FOR A WOMAN AND A GAIJIN. YOU ARE A COWARD, AND I'LL SHOW YOU HOW FAR YOU'VE FALLEN --)
(--WHEN I SKIN YOUR WIFE TO THE BONE AND YOU DO NOTHING TO STOP ME.)
(SATISFIED? YOUR BLOOD DEBT TO YOUR MOTHER LIES UNPAID.)
I DIDN'T WANT TO COME HOME, BECAUSE I HADN'T ADDRESSED SOMETHING... DEEP. THERE IS NO GOOD WAY TO SAY THIS, SO...
PART OF ME HOLDS YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF MY FATHER.
KIAGGGH
(WILL SHE SCREAM LIKE YOUR MOTHER, I WONDER? WILL YOU IGNORE YOUR DEBT TO HER HONOR AS WELL?)

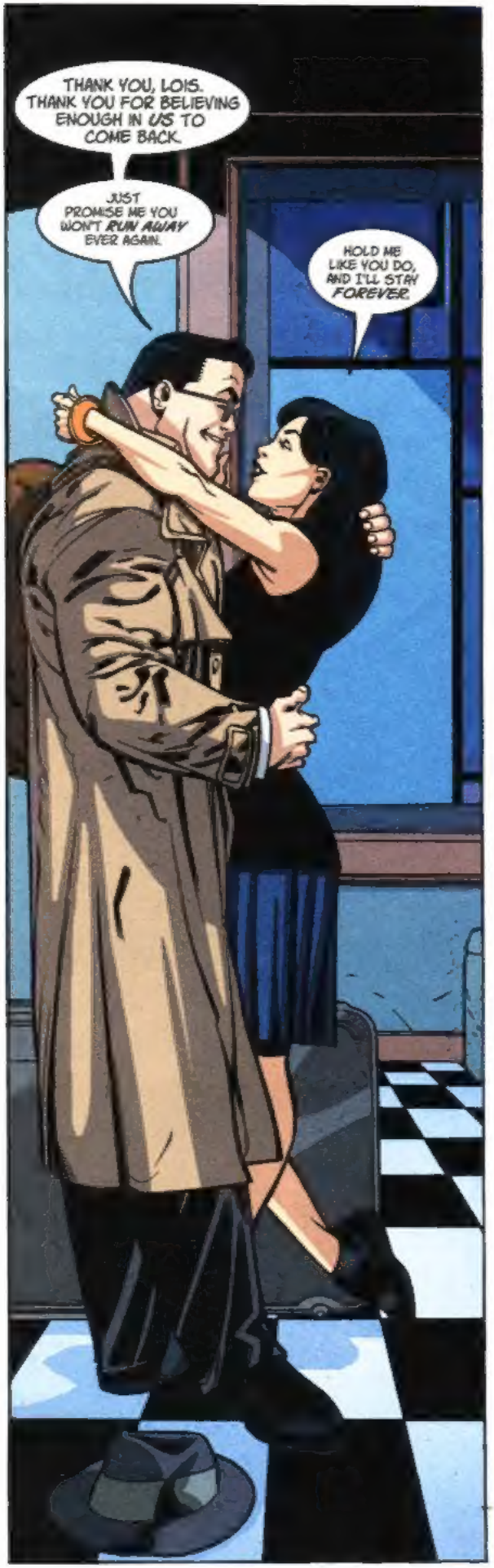
:URK:
SKLICHH
(DIE, DEMON, DIE!)
:HNNH: (AGAIN.)
SUPERMAN CAN DO ANYTHING. SUPERMAN SAVED BILLIONS.
SUPERMAN IS MY HUSBAND...
...BUT HE STILL COULDN'T SAVE MY FATHER FROM DYING.
I KNOW THIS ISN'T FAIR. I KNOW I'M NOT LETTING YOU GET A WORD IN AND I KNOW YOU WOULD HAVE IF YOU COULD HAVE, BUT IT'S HOW I FEEL.
I SPENT THE LAST HANDFUL OF MONTHS RUNNING AWAY FROM IT WITH MY MOTHER INSTEAD OF JUST SPITTING IT OUT.
:HNNNGH:
ARE YOU LEAVING ME?
(NOW THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.)
(THANK YOU, GUNSHIN, FOR HATING ME THE WAY YOU DO.)


SKETCH
(I COULDN'T HAVE DONE THIS WITHOUT YOU.)

I CAME HOME, CLARK... BECAUSE... THE ONLY PERSON WHO I THINK I CAN REALLY WORK THROUGH THIS WITH IS...

...MY HUSBAND, WHO I REALIZED, I NEED -- I WANT -- NOW MORE THAN EVER.
AND THE FIRST THING I WANT IS FOR HIM TO TELL ME HE DOESN'T HATE ME.

(BEEN "MEDITATING," HUSBAND? DOES THAT MEAN YOU'RE READY TO TALK TO --)
(G-GUNSHIN?)


THANK YOU, LOIS. THANK YOU FOR BELIEVING ENOUGH IN US TO COME BACK.
JUST PROMISE ME YOU WON'T RUN AWAY EVER AGAIN.
HOLD ME LIKE YOU DO, AND I'LL STAY FOREVER.

(GUNSHIN! NOT LIKE THIS!)
(NOT LIKE THIS!)
"Some people say that when you get married, you **lose** something -- become half of a **whole.** I wasn't a complete person until I met my wife."
-- Clark Kent
THE END. THE BEGINNING.
NEXT MONTH: KANCER.